

THE RYDER CUP

Golf's Ryder Cup takes place at Gleneagles, Scotland 26-28 September. Bernhard Langer, who has played in ten Ryder Cups, tells Sorted his thoughts on the competition.

BERNHARD LANGER TALKING TO STUART WEIR

The Ryder Cup is a three-day competition between 12 golfers from the USA and 12 from Europe. The match takes place every two years, alternating between Europe and the USA.

Named after Samuel Ryder, who presented the first trophy in the 1920s, it has a long tradition and an important place in the golfing calendar. The format involves foursome (two players taking alternative shots with the same ball), four-ball and singles. There are 28 matches in all and, with one point awarded for each win, a team needs 14½ points to win the Ryder Cup.

"IT'S A LOT HARDER PLAYING FOR YOUR TEAM THAN JUST PLAYING FOR YOURSELF"

Professional golfers are used to playing under pressure. Each week we have to make putts with lots of money at stake and with the eyes of the world upon us. What is different in the Ryder Cup is that you are playing not just for yourself but for your team and for your continent.

We're all hyped up and that's a problem. To treat it as just another tournament would be better. But with everyone around us being totally on edge, it's hard to stay calm and collected and it makes playing very difficult. It's a lot harder playing for your team than just playing for yourself.

I always enjoyed team golf very much but there is certainly an added pressure. When you play for yourself and make a mistake, it is only you who is the loser. In the Ryder Cup you have the added feeling of letting down your partner and the team – a completely different kind of pressure.

In most tournaments the spectators are neutral; they applaud the good shots and are quiet on the bad shots. But in the Ryder Cup the galleries are totally one-sided and will even applaud mistakes by the other team. So when we are playing in the USA it is a very odd experience for me to find a bunker or miss a putt, only to hear the crowd cheering. It is far more emotional than a normal tournament.

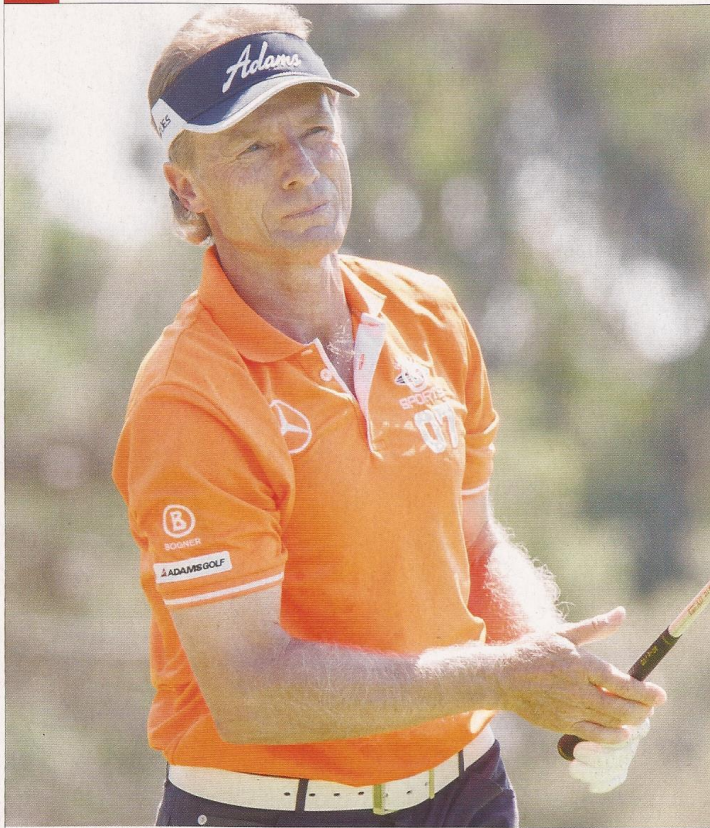
My first Ryder Cup was in 1981 at Walton Heath, Surrey. The USA had a very strong team and won easily, 18½ to 9½. You have to remember too that at that time USA had not lost a Ryder Cup since 1957. It was a mountain for us to climb. My Ryder Cup debut was with Manuel Pinero against Larry Nelson and Lee Trevino, and we lost by one hole. I was shaking, really nervous. I think it is the same with 95 per cent of players making their debuts. It is not easy for a player to turn up and play his best golf in the first round of the Ryder Cup.

In my first Ryder Cup I was in awe of people like Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson. Later in my career, when I had played with all the →





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Bernhard Langer Ryder Cup Record

Played	Won	Halved	Lost	Points	Win %
42	21	6	15	24	57

best players in the world and beaten them as often as they had beaten me, I had a different view of them. But at the beginning I was very nervous and didn't really know what to expect.

I played in ten Ryder Cups. 1985 ranks as a great highlight. To be part of the team that won the Ryder Cup for the first time in 28 years was fantastic. By contributing three points while playing with four different partners probably marked me out as a good team player. Europe won 16½ to 11½.

In 1987 we went to Muirfield Village and went one better and beat the Americans on their home soil. Again I played all five matches. I really liked Muirfield Village, which reminded me a lot of Augusta.

I remember that on the first day as we took the lead, the US crowd became very quiet. I guess there might have been 2,000 Europeans and 10,000 Americans, but it was the Europeans who were making all the noise. The US press were urging the spectators to get behind the team. The next day it was unbelievable; most of the US officials and players' wives were carrying flags and chanting "USA". That was a strange experience, something I had never seen in any Ryder Cup. I felt it was a bit over the top.

It is funny how the draw can keep throwing two players together. That week I played against Larry Nelson three times. My singles match with him was very tight. It see-sawed back and forth, but there was never much in it. We came to the eighteenth level. We each had a putt of two and a half feet and we just looked at each other and said, "good, good", shook hands and walked off. Larry and I are friends and I think we both felt, "I don't want to miss this putt but equally I don't really want you to miss yours". While I did not realise it at the time, that half point took us to fourteen points and meant that, even if we had not yet won, we could not lose.

It is, again, all part of the mystique of the Ryder Cup. Even in the most competitive situation imaginable you don't want your opponent – who may well be a friend – to lose a match by missing a putt and have to live with that for the rest of his career. I have played a lot on the US tour and quite a few of the US players are personal friends, so there is no animosity among us. It means that while I don't want to lose to them, I do want to beat them fair and square and not in controversial circumstances.

In 1989 the match ended 14–14, so we retained the Ryder Cup. One thing that was different about the 1989 Ryder Cup was that we held a Christian service on the Sunday morning behind the ninth and eighteenth greens. I was the only European player who

attended but there were several Americans. Chris de Burgh was staying in the hotel and he came and sang at the service, so we had wonderful music. There was quite a congregation too, as several hundred spectators had arrived early to reserve their places behind the two greens, where so much drama would unfold later in the day.

"WHEN I LOOK BACK NOW I REALISE THAT THERE ARE FAR MORE IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE THAN WINNING A TOURNAMENT."

The 1991 Ryder Cup was at Kiawah Island. This was one of the worst Ryder Cups, in terms of attitude between players and the hostility of the US crowd. Some US newspapers called it "The War on the Shore". I was very unhappy with that. It is not a war; it is a game.

In the singles on the final day, the captain put me in the anchor position, which meant I was the last player out on the course. My opponent was the double US Open Champion, Hale Irwin. At the 15th hole, the US team had a one-point lead and the Ryder Cup trophy would remain in Europe, as we were holders. I was two down after 15 holes. I won the 16th and the 17th. It all came down to the last putt of the last hole in the last match on the last day. On the 18th, I was on the green in two. I had a long putt. I hit it just too hard and it went past the hole. So I could see what the ball did on this side of the hole and therefore what it was likely to do on my next putt. I was left with a six putt to win the match. I just missed.

There are photographs of me just after the putt has missed with a very pained expression on my face. It wasn't just because we had lost the Ryder Cup, though that was bad enough. Part of it was just that the putt had not gone in after it had felt so good.

It was a chance a golfer only gets once in a lifetime, to hole a putt for the Ryder Cup. I did my best but in the end it was not good enough. As I walked off the green, I was very disappointed – for the team, all my colleagues, the captain, for the whole tour, the continent, that I had let them down. I had missed a putt. On the other hand, I knew I had tried my best and had done everything I possibly could.

My relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, put it all in perspective. When I look back now I realise that there are far more important things in life than winning a tournament, or losing a tournament, or making or not making a putt. I know I did my best and I can live with it and go on. I don't live in the past. I live in the future. I am amazed that over ten years later, people still want to talk about the putt.

When a journalist asked me about it the following week, I said: "Looking at the Ryder Cup from a Christian point of view, there has only ever been one perfect man, the Lord Jesus, and we killed him. I only missed a putt."

The Ryder Cup has been an important part of my career. I've cried in Ryder Cups, but I've had many laughs as well. I am sure that the 2014 Ryder Cup will be a really exciting event too. ■